

## **FDA Warning on Mislabeled Monkfish**

**Posted on: 05/30/2007**

FDA is warning consumers not to buy or eat imported fish labeled as monkfish, which actually may be puffer fish, containing a potentially deadly toxin called tetrodotoxin. Eating puffer fish that contain this potent toxin can result in serious illness or death.

Tetrodotoxin is not destroyed by common food preparation or storage, such as cooking or freezing. Monkfish do not contain tetrodotoxin.

The product was imported and distributed by Hong Chang Corp., Santa Fe Springs, CA.

Consumers concerned that they may have purchased this fish should contact their retailer and ask if the product was received from Hong Chang Corp.

The product should not be eaten, it should be thrown away. Care should be exercised in handling the fish, as the tetrodotoxin may be present on the skin and flesh of the fish. Consumers should wash hands thoroughly after handling the fish.

Two people in the Chicago area became ill after consuming homemade soup containing the fish. One was hospitalized due to severe illness.

FDA's analysis of the fish confirmed the presence of potentially life-threatening levels of tetrodotoxin.

Initial symptoms of tetrodotoxin poisoning occur 30 minutes to several hours after food containing the toxin is consumed. Tetrotoxin poisoning is characterized initially by tingling of the lips and tongue. Tingling of the face and extremities and numbness follow. Subsequent symptoms may include headache, balance problems, excessive salivation, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain. Consumers experiencing these symptoms should seek immediate medical care and are encouraged to report their illness to local health authorities. In severe cases, muscles can become paralyzed, and death may follow from respiratory muscle paralysis.

A total of 282 22-pound boxes labeled as monkfish were distributed to wholesalers in Illinois, California and Hawaii beginning in September 2006. These fish were then sold to restaurants or sold in stores. In one instance, the retailer labeled the fish as "bok," the Korean name for puffer fish.

The white 22-pound boxes were labeled in black ink. One box panel is labeled as: "FROZEN MONKFISH GUTTED AND HEAD-OFF" and "PRODUCT OF CHINA." A second panel bears nutritional facts and the following: "Ingredients: Monk fish; Imported by: Hong Chang Corp, Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670; Product of China (P.R.C.)." A third panel has a checkbox indicating the size as either "0.5-1" or "1-2" and shows the net weight as 22 pounds. There are no manufacturing codes on the box. The fish in the box are individually wrapped in plastic bags with no labeling.

FDA allows puffer fish to be imported into the United States only under strict provisions that minimize the risk of the toxin being present in the fish. The recalled fish were not imported in compliance with those restrictions. FDA is examining all entries from the Chinese supplier and will take additional action, if warranted.